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RUEHYN/AMEMBASSY SANAA PRIORITY 0223
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SUBJECT: EGYPT GRIPING TO FRENCH ABOUT SOMALIA ANTI-PIRACY
MISSION

Classified By: Political Counselor Andrew Young, Reasons 1.4b,d

¶1. (C) Egypt has been pressing French authorities about the geographic scope of EU anti-piracy operations, according to both the French MFA and the Egyptian Embassy. AF DAS-Equivalent Helene Le Gal complained November 18 to Africa Watcher about Egypt's unhelpful stance and noted that Yemen, too, had now voiced unease about EU naval patrols. Egypt should be thanking the EU, not criticizing it, since without a robust anti-piracy effort the shipping industry would likely adopt alternate routes that avoid the Suez Canal, thereby reducing Egyptian revenues. Le Gal explained that Egypt opposed EU naval operations in the Red Sea, rolling her eyes at allegations that the EU mission had a &Zionist8 agenda to internationalize that body of water.

¶2. (C) Egyptian Second Secretary Tarek Tayel, who contacted Africa Watcher independently on the same subject on November 19, confirmed his government's concerns. He explained that Cairo knew full well "from a professional perspective" that there was no Israeli or other linkage; however, he admitted there had been a few irrational accusations in the popular press. EU operations in the Red Sea were an infringement on the sovereignty of countries in the region, he argued; moreover, piracy occurred primarily off the Somali coast in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. Any Red Sea spillover was minimal, he insisted, and within the region's own capacity to control. Tayel said that the EU reach into the Red Sea was excessive, extending to the Eritrean border with Sudan. He conceded he did not know if there were active EU patrols there. (Note: MFA Somalia Desk Officer Thierry Caboche explained November 20 that the EU needed latitude to operate in the Red Sea for purposes of hot pursuit and in order to escort key shipping vessels, as and if necessary. End note.)

¶3. (C) Tayel said Egypt had so far limited itself to bilateral protests, noting that France, in addition to its current role as EU president, had been the driving force behind the EU anti-piracy mission. Egypt now sought to coordinate a common position within the region, and was convening a senior-level meeting November 20 in Cairo. (Yemen was to co-host, according to Caboche.)

¶4. (C) Comment: Our MFA contacts make no effort to conceal their irritation, viewing the Egyptian position as irrational and contrary to economic interests. We leave to Embassy Cairo to assess the seriousness of the Egyptian protest but wonder whether Cairo's reaction is only reflexive posturing of its Red Sea "primacy" and a bid for EU attention.
STAPLETON